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ABSTRACT

This paper describes research regarding preschool director's career decisions and provides a framework for understanding the growth and development of director competence through the career cycle. A 4-page survey about career development was completed by 257 directors of part- and full-day, nonprofit and for-profit early childhood education programs in 4 states. The survey elicited background information on the director, current and past job expectations and concerns, sources of satisfaction and frustration, and reflections about their career decisions. Respondents were asked to select the category that best described their current administrative capability, and to select from one of six career stages that best described their current career stage. Finally, directors were asked to plot on a career path diagram the sequence of different stages they had experienced at different points in their careers and to think of a metaphor that best described their career path as a director. These results and the six-stage career framework are described. A copy of the survey is included. Contains 50 references. (JPB)

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NAVIGATING THE RAPIDS:
DIRECTORS REFLECT ON THEIR CAREERS AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Navigating the Rapids:
Directors Reflect on Their Careers and Their Professional Development

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My interest in directors' career decisions was prompted by a cartoon that appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle* several years ago. It depicted an inquiring reporter asking a young woman why she wanted to become a mortician. "Because," she said, "I enjoy working with people." That cartoon sent me into hoots of laughter. Just a few days before I had participated on a panel speaking about the joys and frustrations of directing a preschool before an audience of local high school seniors who were considering different career options. One young woman in the audience had asked me why I decided to become a director, and, as you can guess, I replied, "Because I enjoy working with people."

People who enter early childhood education are usually idealistic and eager to improve conditions for young children. Often, though, they lack insight into their career motivations and do not have a well-conceived plan for achieving the professional experiences that will help them fulfill their career goals. An understanding of directors' career decisions, their concerns, and their expectations can help teacher educators and career counselors to better support the professional development of this group of early childhood educators. This paper describes research regarding directors' career decisions and provides a framework for understanding the growth and development of director competence through the career cycle.

Methodology

The sample for this study was 257 directors of part- and full-day, nonprofit and for-profit early childhood programs in four states. The study was conducted in two parts: First, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 directors using a "think aloud technique" to discern whether director reflections on their careers point to any distinct career stages and differential levels of director competency. The process was protocolled verbatim. The content analysis yielded six stages and three competency levels. This information provided the conceptual framework for the development of a four-page survey given to 257 directors.

The survey (Appendix A) elicited background information on the director, current and past job expectations and concerns, sources of satisfaction and frustration, and reflections about their career decisions. Respondents were asked to select the category that best described their current administrative capability (beginning, competent, or master director) and to select from one of six career stages that best described their current career stage. Finally, directors were asked to plot on a career path diagram the sequence of different stages they had experienced at different points in their careers and to think of a metaphor that best described their career path as a director.

Becoming a Director -- Intention or Improvisation

In Composing a Life, Bateson states that "the act of composing our lives is oftentimes improvisation, discovering the shape of our creation along the way, rather than pursuing a vision already defined" (Bateson, p. 1). That is clearly the case for early childhood directors. Less than one-fifth of directors report that they always knew they wanted to become a director of a center and actively pursued the position. In response to how they reached their current position, the largest percentage of directors indicate that others saw their leadership ability and encouraged them (often persuaded and coaxed them) to take the position. Shakeshaft (1989) found the same pattern in her study of women in administrative positions at the elementary and secondary levels.

Caffarella (1992) examines how the themes of centrality of relationships, the diverse and nonlinear patterns of development, and the continuing importance of identity and intimacy in women's development shape the practice of women serving as leaders in organizations. These themes also are characteristic of early childhood directors. Caffarella believes that a "single linear pattern of psychosocial development appears to be almost the antithesis of what might be termed the 'norm' for women. Rather, women's development is characterized by multiple patterns, role discontinuities, and the need to maintain a fluid sense of self" (1992, p. 20).

The lack of a focused career path leading to a director's position is not surprising given that the field of early childhood lacks a well-articulated career lattice or an established pattern of mentor relationships to provide guidance for those at different points in their careers. Approximately 90% of the directors studied report that they were teachers before assuming their first directorship; but few report that they had any formal administrative training prior to beginning their jobs as directors. For many, their own experience in the form of learning while doing was the most relied upon source for acquiring management knowledge and skills. Only 32% report that they felt confident and self-assured when they first became a director. Seventy-nine percent indicate they were not prepared for the kinds of issues they encountered.

Directors' Career Cycles

A director's career cycle refers to that professional journey of change as reflected in the individual's competence, self-confidence, and actual behavior at different career points. Experience, along with continuing professional development, moves the director through various stages from novice to maturity. These stages reflect different concerns and expectations.

Considerable research exists on the career stages of preschool and elementary school teachers (Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Katz, 1972; Krupp, 1987; VanderVen, 1988) as well as elementary and secondary school principals (Bloom, 1997; Kremer-Hayon & Fessler, 1992). Little research, however, has focused on the career stages of early childhood

administrators as a distinct group. Even so, it is possible to draw on the theoretical literature of teachers' career stages to develop an understanding of specific issues characterizing directors at various points in their careers. Most applicable is the work of Fessler and Christensen (1992) who view the career cycle from a systems perspective. They believe that individuals move in and out of career stages in a dynamic ebb-and-flow response to personal and environmental factors.

Table 1 adapts the work of Fessler and Christensen to delineate six stages describing the experiences of early childhood directors: survival, competence building, enthusiastic and growing, career frustration, reflective and inspiring, and career wind down. This career-stage model should not be viewed as a linear progression from one step to the next. Not all directors experience all stages and some directors experience recurring cycles of stages as they move from one early childhood administrative role to another. Table 1 also summarizes the percentages of directors in each stage as reported by them.

Career-cycle development cannot be viewed as occurring in a vacuum, for it certainly is affected by where individuals are in their adult developmental life cycle. Adult life-cycle development refers to those predictable and unpredictable passages that characterize adult growth and influence adult learning (Erikson, 1959; Gould, 1978; Levine, 1989; Levinson, 1986; Sheehy, 1995). Age and phase theories of development are premised on the belief that there is a definable pattern and sequence to development. Where one is in the adult developmental cycle has impact on how one interprets role-related issues and events. As Jepsen notes, "Work career is certainly embedded within life history, as one strand is entwined in a rope" (Jepsen, 1990, p. 121).

An emerging body of feminist literature has explored the distinct characteristics of the adult life cycle from a woman's perspective (Caffarella, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976; Noddings, 1984; Peck, 1986). This body of literature draws attention to the centrality of relationships, attachment, and caring as central themes in women's adult development. Women do not try to compartmentalize their work lives from their personal lives; there is an overlapping of roles and concerns at all points in the adult life cycle. As Levine states, "Women bring their whole selves to work" (1989, p. 77).

In this study, the metaphors directors use and the personal stories they tell about their careers provide a rich source of data about the identity transformation that takes place over the career cycle. Table 2 summarizes the metaphorical themes that capture directors' personal career experiences. These experiences fall into four categorical characterizations: a journey (*going on a road trip – lots of surprises, a few roadblocks and detours, but never a dull moment)*; stretching, growing, and developing (*an emerging butterfly–growing and changing in form and ability);* expanding horizons (*climbing a mountain – every time I stop to look at the view it is different and more breath-taking);* and challenging or fast-paced (*navigating the rapids – the white water is exhilarating but sometimes terrifying. I need to be vigilant to the hazards around me so I don't capsize).*

Directors' Concerns and Expectations

In conceptualizing a director's career cycle, implicit is the belief that administering an early childhood program is a complex process in which expertise is gained over a period of time. Research on early childhood administrators has documented their concerns regarding specific job-related tasks (Austin & Morrow, 1985; Bloom, 1990), but these concerns have not been put into a developmental framework. Concerns and expectations of directors can be loosely grouped into three categories: the beginning director, the competent director, and the master director. In this study of 257 directors, approximately 30% describe themselves as beginning directors; 60% fit into the competent-director category; and only 10% report believing they are master directors.

The Beginning Director

The beginning director is filled with excitement and anticipation, eager to make a meaningful contribution. That excitement, however, is coupled with anxiety. Many directors identify with the term "reality shock" (Kramer, 1974) in describing their reactions as they assume their first administrative position. Several circumstances shock them: the emotional and physical stamina required of the job, the amount of paperwork, the range and intensity of staff's and parents' needs, and the lack of support they often get from the center's administrative board or agency. One director, Crystal, now in her fourth year administering a program, reflects on her start:

> *I dreamed of the day I would be a director – to be the one 'in charge.' I really thought I was well prepared for the position. How naive I was! I really didn't have a clue about so many things. I survived that first year because of sheer determination, not because I was the least bit competent.*

The picture Crystal describes, the literature refers to as "unconscious incompetence" (Howell, 1986). She doesn't even know what she doesn't know, which is one reason why needs assessments for novice directors are not very valuable. An individual needs a base of experience to begin to understand the knowledge and skill areas that need to be mastered. As beginning directors build a base of administrative competence during their first and second years on the job, they quickly move into a stage of "conscious incompetence" – being very aware of all there is yet to learn about the job's administrative demands.

Despite the need for guided entry into the administrative role, the sink or swim method of induction seems to prevail. One director notes, "*I didn't know the difference between a debit or credit, yet I was responsible for a half-million-dollar operating budget that first year.*" Few states require any specialized training in management as a prerequisite for the director role. Most early childhood center directors are selected because of exemplary performance as classroom teachers, not because they have demonstrated competence in administration (Bloom, 1990).

New directors in this study were found to have intense concerns regarding feelings of adequacy, their ability to handle the managerial demands of the job, and the desire to be liked and appreciated by staff and parents. They also have concerns about the quality and impact of their program, but when these concerns are probed deeper, they are usually couched in language relating to the directors' need to be validated, to be told they are doing a good job.

Reipe states another concern, "If you are the new kid on the block, or an old kid with a new hat, the existing group will initially view you and your actions with reservation and suspicion" (1996, p. 14). In this four-state survey, some directors who have been promoted from within talk about the instant isolation they experience once they assume their new administrative role. As one director states,

> *All of a sudden I was the enemy; no longer was I one of the group. It upset me so much when I walked into the kitchen on my third day as director and three teachers stopped talking. It really hurt.*

These feelings are disconcerting to the new director who wants desperately to be liked as well as respected. It appears that these feelings are not unique to early childhood administration. Duke (1988) heard similar anxieties expressed in his interviews of first-year principals he interviewed. Fuller (1969), Ryan (1986), and Veenman (1984) provide accounts of similar concerns by new teachers.

Many, but not all, beginning directors have a survival focus – concerned with "just making it." These directors may be so preoccupied with whether they are personally adequate for the meeting multiple demands confronting them each day that they are unable to see beyond the momentary exigencies. Many beginning directors are also concerned about status, their personal status in the organization and their status in the field. The reason that a survival focus and concerns about status do not uniformly describe all beginning directors is that many individuals moving into program administration are in their thirties or forties. The range of life experiences and the greater sense of self-assurance that accompanies adult development may temper some of the insecurities that characterize the beginning director who is in his or her twenties.

The Competent Director

The competent director emerges after a period of competency building between one and four years into the job. Somewhere in this period the individual makes a subtle but important shift from struggling to juggling. The competent director is no longer concerned about merely coping. Rather, concerns seem to center on time (being able to accomplish all that needs to be done) and on meeting expectations (both externally and internally imposed). In other words, competent

directors are not concerned about whether or not they can do the wide range of tasks demanded of them; they worry about how they can do them better.

The competent director has come to terms with two myths in program administration – that directors will be liked by everyone and that one right answer exists for every issue. They have also accepted the reality that hard work often goes unrecognized and unappreciated and that the qualities that worked in making them a superstar teacher are not necessarily the same qualities that will make them a successful director.

Competent directors can be described as fitting Howell's (1986) "conscious competence" category of levels of learning. They are very aware of what they know and how they need to carry out the demands of their job. Balance seems to be a key issue for competent directors – balance between personal and professional obligations, balance between people and paper demands of the job, balance between meeting the needs of individuals and those of the organization.

The Master Director

The master director describes a small percentage of 257 directors studied – experienced directors having moved to a higher level of reflection and competence in their administrative roles. These directors still worry about how they are going to juggle the multiple demands of their jobs, but they don't seem to dwell on the stressful aspects of their role. Master directors describe their centers from a systems perspective; they understand the nature of organizational change and the importance of their role as change agent. They are confident in their ability to handle virtually any curve ball tossed their way.

Master directors describe themselves most often as *"role model," "advocate," "mentor," or "leader."* Most important, they have the metacognitive ability to stand back and reflect on *how* they are doing *while* they are doing. They seem to understand themselves well – their emotions and defense mechanisms as well as their cognitive strengths and weaknesses. The examples they give regarding administrative decision-making clearly illustrate affective neutrality – the ability to work with staff, parents, and the center's board with objectivity and tempered emotional involvement.

Master directors seem comfortable and confident in their personal leadership style. Many describe their conscious attempt to balance activities that require gathering, sharing, and analyzing information in linear ways (yang) with activities that involve creativity, emotional expression, and personal insight (yin) (Nagel, 1994). Most important, they have developed a clear sense about role expectations and are able to communicate to their coworkers how they perceive the scope and nature of their administrative role so that role expectations are more compatible.

Master directors seldom talk in absolutes or look for quick-fix solutions to problems but rather understand that most issues surfacing in early childhood program administration are complex and can be viewed from multiple perspectives. They challenge the status quo by looking for new ways to solve old problems. They have the capacity for critical thinking – the ability to make a judgment and then qualitatively explain or defend that judgment.

Master directors see themselves as mentors to their teachers and to other directors. They see the connection between the developmental concepts and instructional strategies used with children and their work with adults. As Virginia, an 11-year veteran of an NAEYC-accredited program states, *"I look for those teachable moments with my staff, an opportunity to scaffold their understanding of an issue to a higher level of analysis."*

Master directors are able to make explicit and to articulate their theories and beliefs about leadership, management, and their role in the process of organizational change. They reflect on and analyze the effects of their leadership style and apply the results of these reflections to future actions.

Like beginning and competent directors, master directors are also concerned about the diminishing pool of highly qualified staff, about the fact that there are too few hours in a day to do so many things, and about the public's perception of early childhood. They don't perseverate on these issues though. They understand the nature of organizational change and their own role in achieving long-term goals, both for their program and for the field of early childhood.

Master directors still are somewhat task focused, but direct their primary concerns to do the impact the program has on the lives of children, their families, and the community. These directors are both process and outcome oriented. They are fully aware of the many demands of their administrative role but will not compromise their expectation of excellence.

The Developmental Progression of Concerns

The developmental progression from beginning director to competent director to master director involves a shift in the focus of directors' concerns and how they spend their time. The pace of activity in a center in terms of interactions, activities, and unanticipated interruptions provides precious little time in a typical day for a beginning director to reflect or even anticipate events. Directors report that they feel out of control initially. Gradually as they build a repertoire of competencies they grow in self-confidence and are better able to prioritize their time to attend to the big issues having impact on program effectiveness.

The focus of concerns also seems to take a shift as directors move from beginning to competent to master director. Directors report they initially spend most of their time on the technical

aspects of program operations – management concerns. Gradually as they build a repertoire of competence they shift their attention to planning, vision building, and other leadership concerns. Along the way a gradual shift in attitudes occurs, from idealism to realism. Lofty expectations are dashed in exchange for How they will behave? and What will they achieve? Directors become more pragmatic in their expectations.

Growth and Change over the Career Cycle

The process of change that characterizes the professional growth and development of individuals from beginning to master director appears as a spiraling funnel affected by formal and informal educational opportunities, experience, the context of development, and the sphere of relationships involved. These influences can be family, formal and informal mentors, or other significant individuals who serve to inspire, support, and promote deeper levels of self- and professional awareness during the career cycle.

The progression from beginning to competent to master director represents a transformation in the developing administrator that is far more complex, however, than the mere accumulation of new knowledge and acquired skills. It represents a positive shift in self-efficacy expectations, an individual's ability to think more abstractly about issues and events and take alternative points of view, and an increased capacity for introspection.

Research in the area of developmental psychology can serve as a framework for understanding the types of changes that occur during adult development and impact competence, self-confidence, and actual behavior. There is clearly overlap in the developmental domains briefly described here. The intent is not to be exhaustive but merely highlight some of the many ways that directors continue to grow as adults through the career cycle.

Self-Efficacy Expectations

A self-efficacy expectation is a belief regarding one's ability to perform and master certain behaviors. In other words, it is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviors required to produce a desired result. Expectations of personal efficacy not only determine which behaviors directors will initiate, they also regulate how much effort they will expend on any particular task, and how persistent they will be in the face of obstacles or ambiguous, unpredictable, and stressful elements (Bandura, 1982). The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the more vigorous and persistent a director's efforts will be at a given task.

Self-efficacy can be conceptualized as a dynamic, cyclical process. Persistence in trying situations helps a director develop competence and gain a more realistic assessment of his/her abilities. The result is enhanced feelings of self-efficacy that foster further success. A director

forms an estimate of his/her personal efficacy by evaluating information from four principal sources: past performance, observation of others' accomplishments, verbal persuasion from others, and emotional arousal. High arousal generally debilitates or inhibits performance because individuals are less likely to expect success when they are tense or anxious. With the passage of time and the building of competence, the self-efficacy of a director grows.

Conceptual Level

The way individuals think about issues, events, and relationships depends on their level of conceptual development. In general, it can be said that the development of higher conceptual levels involves a progression in thinking from concrete to abstract and from simple to complex. Higher levels of conceptual reasoning move an individual from thinking in terms of simple stereotypes and clichés to the ability to tolerate paradox, contradictions, and ambiguity (Harvey, Hunt, & Schroder, 1961; Hunt, 1970; Miller, 1981). Abstract conceptual structure is associated with creativity, greater tolerance for stress, greater flexibility, and a wider array of coping behaviors.

A director's level of conceptual development directly affects the way he or she defines and solves problems. At a lower level of conceptual reasoning, individuals will look for single solutions to complex problems. They will often be dedicated to a single one-size-fits-all approach to management. Concrete thinking also tends to be accompanied by absolutism, categorical thinking, and a greater belief in external causality and an "oughtness" of rules. Individuals functioning at a higher conceptual level tend to be more adaptive in their administrative style, more flexible and tolerant, and better able to employ a wider range of administrative strategies in solving problems.

Ways of Knowing -- Meaning Making

Throughout the life cycle, individuals strive to make sense out of their experiences and their choices. In Robert Kegan's (1982, 1994) words, the activity of being a person is the activity of "meaning making." As individuals develop, their needs and interpersonal relationships shift to become part of a larger environment. Kegan describes three systems of meaning in adulthood: Interpersonal, Institutional, and Inter-Institutional. In each stage, the preceding stage is subsumed into the next, still functional, but no longer dominant.

In the first system, ***Interpersonal***, personal identity is dependent on relationships and there is a dependence on relationships with external authorities that guide meaning making. A director in this stage will rely on the expertise of a supervisor, an expert, or a mentor as the ultimate authority on an issue. Because individuals at this stage are inextricably tied to others for their sense of self, they often rely on niceness, compliance, and doing what they should for approval to keep themselves balanced (Levine, 1989).

A new sense of self, self-dependence, and self-ownership with its own rules, standards, and authority are characteristic of the ***Institutional*** stage. The self can relate to multiple others in mutual interactions generating internal standards and values. For directors at this level, personal achievement, competence, and responsibility are prominent and multiple views of a situation can be tolerated.

Individuality and interdependence are prominent in individuals operating at the highest stage, ***Inter-institutional***. These individuals, Kegan states, can mentally step outside their own mental system to question its assumptions and logic. They are not threatened by data which challenges the status quo. It is at this level that the director draws back from a high orientation to achievement and moves toward an unfolding of his or her own psychological being. Characteristic of this stage (which Kegan believes only a few adults achieve) is a high degree of autonomy as well as a capacity for interdependence. Costa and Garmston (1994) use the term "holonomy" from the Greek *holos* meaning 'whole' and *on* meaning 'part' to describe the qualities needed to operate interdependently, while maintaining a sense of personal integrity.

Perspective-Taking and Point-of-View

Perspective-taking is related to the concept of centrism, "point-of-view." Perspective-taking skills are essential for effective interpersonal behavior. While adults have the cognitive capacity for in-depth and societal perspective-taking (Selman, 1980), they may not regularly view phenomena from different points of view. Three types of centrism are possible – ego, allo, and macro.

Directors operating from an ***egocentric*** point of view interpret events and incidents from a personal perspective. They often feel the need to change other people and can slip into patterns of blame and punishment. The actions of others are interpreted personally, as attacks on one's self (Saban, Killion, & Green, 1994). Directors who operate predominantly from an egocentric perspective usually expect staff to adjust to their style rather than flexing their style to meet the needs of their staff.

An ***allocentric*** point of view involves tuning in to how others see the world and experience events. From the root "allo" meaning "other," directors operating from an allocentric perspective are able to comprehend another person's feeling state, to understand the perspective of another – to imagine and reflect on what another person does, why they might do it, and how they might feel. Perspective taking is a skill that is vital in healthy parent, staff, and board relations. Allocentric environments support mutual accountability and responsiveness; staff have time to think about each other's well-being. This creates the possibility of empathy, the associated emotional response of perspective taking (Magnuson, Bachman, & Theunissen, 1996).

A ***macrocentric*** perspective looks at how the larger system or the organization might view actions, events, or experiences (Saban et al., 1994). It considers the interdependent relationship between the individual and the collective. A macrocentric perspective is necessary for a truly transactional leadership style emphasizing both the needs of the individual and the needs of the organization under different circumstances.

Reflective Stance

Reflection on professional practice refers to the capacity of individuals to think creatively, imaginatively, and, at times self critically about what they are doing (Lasley, 1992; Schon, 1987; Smyth, 1989). Individuals who use a variety of reflective approaches have a better awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses and can better understand, monitor, and adjust their behavior in personal and professional interactions. A person's ability to utilize a variety of reflective approaches to understanding issues and events is linked to level of conceptual and ego development (Loevinger, 1976; Oja, 1990), but precisely how these changes take place and under what conditions they can best be nurtured is still unknown.

The most common type of reflection is referred to as ***reflection-on-action***. This is simply a replay of an experience to review, revisit, or recall what has happened. ***Reflection-in-action*** refers to the simultaneous awareness of metacognitive process and actions while they occur. Killion (1988) refers to this as an "out of body" experience which occurs when we watch ourselves act with consciousness of our thinking and the decisions we are making. A third type of reflection is referred to as ***reflection-for-action***. This is a predictive process for forecasting how we will use what we have learned from reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. In involves consciously adjusting our behaviors based on our reflections (Saban et al., 1994).

Lasley (1992) believes that the content or substance of reflection also goes through a change as individuals gain mastery in their profession. In the early childhood arena this means that directors' reflections begin with a ***technical focus*** as they examine the *how* of specific management practices and attempt to refine them. From here they move to a ***conceptual focus***, striving to understand the theoretical basis for different practices and fostering consistency between an espoused theory (*"I believe in participatory management"*) and actual reality (*"Do I involve teachers in setting the agenda for staff meetings?"*). The highest level of reflection takes on a ***dialectical focus*** where directors engage in an actual internal dialogue about issues that influence their professional practice. They look critically at the ethical basis for what they do to determine how practices affect different constituents: children, parents, teachers, and the community (*"Is a model of participatory management the most appropriate management approach given the experience and maturity level of my staff?"*). The emphasis becomes reflecting on the deeper philosophical issues of *why*, which that provide the foundation for administrative practice.

Developmental changes that characterize patterns of behavior and thought processes over the career cycle offer us broad insights into the way we might support the development of directors. Oja (1990) has shown how in-service training geared to the adult developmental levels of educators can move individuals to higher levels of cognitive development. Bloom and Sheerer (1992) provide evidence of how leadership training programs impact directors' self-efficacy expectations.

Supporting Directors Through Their Career Cycle

Levine (1989) reminds us that adult development is complex, slow, and untidy and that support is an essential precondition for growth. If we expect adults to grow, we must create contexts that encourage and celebrate their development. Having a perspective about adult development and career stages can provide clues to the kinds of professional support that directors might need at various stages in their development.

Although the beginning directors' need for help is apparent, programs are few in which directors are supported throughout the first years in their administrative roles (Bloom & Rafanello, 1995; Morgan, Azer, Costley, Genser, Goodman, Lombardi, & McGimsey, 1993). Two current trends in the field provide a hopeful sign of change: the emergence of a directors' credential delineating desired qualifications for the position and the expansion of large corporate-sponsored programs that provide mentoring and administrative support during those first crucial years. A directors' credential that specifies the knowledge and skills needed for making a smooth adjustment during the survival and competency-building stages of a director's career if widely adopted, may help promote the emergence of preservice training programs for early childhood administrators.

Training and mentoring for directors at various stages should focus on different criteria: beginning directors need to focus on the technical and rudimentary aspects of the job to develop administrative competence before they begin to confront more complex and important issues of why certain administrative practices should be used. These directors view the world in relatively straightforward terms. They may be intimidated by initiatives that force them to reflect on, or think through, how things should be accomplished. Involvement in directors' support groups is particularly useful for directors at this stage. Such support groups can provide a context for sharing and discussion.

Training and mentoring for competent directors should focus on the conceptual and theoretical aspects of program administration. Understanding the theoretical basis for organizational practice and fostering consistency between an espoused theory and reality are appropriate topics for directors at this point of their professional development. They need to see consistency between what they practice and what they preach. They need to be able to defend what they do and articulate how center policies and procedures support program quality.

Competent directors often need help in learning how to delegate responsibilities to make work more manageable. They also benefit from a support in balancing their personal and professional lives. In addition, recognition is important to competent directors. Opportunities to showcase their talents and accomplishments are important. Competent directors also need occasional down time or short-term leave to rejuvenate themselves. Such experiences are essential for maintaining a long-term commitment to the field.

Master directors have the capacity to engage in dialectical forms of reflection. They can look critically at the ethical basis for what is happening at their centers and at the implications of decisions in terms of the immediate needs of children and their families as well as the broader societal goals. Avenues for growth, renewal, and enhanced professionalism for directors at this stage might include sabbaticals or grants that give directors the time and resources they need to expand their professional interests and contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.

A Final Word

Whitmyer stresses the importance of finding meaningful work and the Buddhist tradition of "right livelihood" and that "Work is no less necessary for our emotional and physical health than food or shelter" (1994, p. 19). He believes that reflecting on what we do, how we do it, and why we do it, will help expand and enhance our ability to find meaningful work. Self-awareness, reflection, and self-assessment are integral tools that facilitate this process. A fulfilling job has balance and diversity, coherence and fit. Bateson (1989) describes it as as much crafted as it is the result of a series of serendipitous decisions we make along the way

This study has provided a framework for thinking about directors' career stages and their growth and development over the career cycle. Additional research is needed to better understand how changes in self-efficacy expectations, conceptual development, meaning making, perspective taking, and reflective stance occur as a function of experience, education, and mentoring.

By understanding the dynamics of the career cycle, teacher educators and career counselors can be better prepared to assess what directors are experiencing and help them make career adjustments if necessary. Providing directors with the time and tools for introspection and reflection will help them understand that they are not the first to experience the insecurities of the survival stage, the pace and pressures of the enthusiastic and growing period, or the feelings of disillusionment encountered in a careers' frustration stage. Knowledge about career stages and adult developmental milestones can better equip directors for navigating the rapids with skill and finesse and even enjoying the thrill of the adventure.

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Table 1
Perceptage of Directors in Different Career Stages (N=257)

Survival **(7%)**

I just try to get through the day without a major problem occurring.

I am striving for acceptance and attempting to achieve a comfort and security level in dealing with everyday management issues and problems.

Competence Building **(20%)**

I am slowly improving my administrative skills and abilities.

I seek out new materials, methods, and strategies.

I attend conferences, workshops, and classes on my own initiative.

Enthusiastic and Growing **(38%)**

I feel competent and confident in my role as director, but I continue to grow as a professional.

I am constantly seeking new ways to enrich my abilities.

Career Frustration **(7%)**

I am frustrated and disillusioned with early childhood administration.

My job satisfaction is waning and I have begun to question why I am doing this work.

Reflective and Inspiring **(21%)**

I have achieved a high level of competence and am perceived by my colleagues as a leader in the area of program administration.

I am a mentor to other directors.

Career Wind-Down **(7%)**

I am preparing to leave my administrative role.

I am looking forward to a career change or retirement.

This framework is adapted from the work of Fessler, R., & Christensen, J. (1992). The teacher career cycle. Boston, Allyn & Bacon.

Table 2
Metaphorical Characterizations of Career Paths (N=257)

My career as a director has been like...

a journey

- going on a road trip – lots of surprises, a few roadblocks and detours, but never a dull moment.
- a sightseeing trip on a winding road though the country with lots of hills and valleys.
- a never-ending road that is both rough and smooth, curvy and straight, wide and narrow and taking me to the place I want to go, with many rewarding stops along the way.
- going through a large maze without a map to guide me – I encounter many twists and turns , often unsure of where I am going exactly.
- I'm on a road trip. Sometimes I encounter heavy traffic, detours, wrong turns, and near-miss crashes, but I'm headed in the right direction.
- a walk through a tropical rain forest – sometimes warm and rewarding; sometimes running into a wild animal.

stretching, growing, and developing

- a Polaroid picture coming into focus.
- learning yoga – at first twisting and stretching into positions and feeling uncomfortable, gradually becoming more flexible and adept and able to ease into positions without a problem.
- a puppy who began with enthusiasm and misplaced energy, then went to doggy school and grew to be a loyal and helpful contributor to the family.
- a sculptor creating a masterpiece out of a glob of clay.
- a toddler learning to walk, run, skip, and jump.
- a tree growing, which started from a little seed and with a lot of sunshine and rain it has grown into a sturdy oak with lots of acorns.
- stitching together a tapestry of experiences that have given me new confidence and competence.
- an emerging butterfly – growing and changing in form and ability.

expanding horizons

- climbing a ladder – with each challenging rung, I've grown, learned, and developed into a more competent professional.
- climbing a mountain – every time I stop to look at the view, it is different and more breathtaking.
- a skyscraper – each new floor offering new tasks and responsibilities.

challenging or fast-paced

- navigating the rapids – the white water is exhilarating but sometimes terrifying; I need to be vigilant to the hazards around me so I don't capsize.
- a corvette – fast-paced and exciting!
- an amazing bestseller – each new chapter has brought exciting challenges and adventures.
- being thrown into the ocean without a life jacket and – surprise, surprise – I became a swimmer.
- an ice skater on a pond – usually smooth with a few stumbles and avoiding the holes and thin ice.
- putting together a jigsaw puzzle – each new piece contributes to the picture of what I will become.
- riding a roller coaster – the ups and downs are exhilarating and usually unpredictable.
- a 5½ -foot swimming pool – whenever my feet touch bottom my head is underwater.
- an eternal rehearsal – always practiced and ready, yet never involved in the main event.

Appendix A

DIRECTORS' ROLE PERCEPTIONS

This questionnaire is designed to find out how you view your job and your center as a place to work. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Please be candid. Anonymity will be ensured.

Current position: director ____ assistant director ____ Age: ____ Sex: M ____ F ____

Educational background: CDA ____ AA degree ____ BA degree ____ MA degree ____ Ph.D. ____

How long have you worked in the field of early childhood? _____ years

How long have you worked in an administrative position? _____ years _____ months

How long have you worked in your current administrative position? _____ years _____ months

To whom do you report? board _____ agency supervisor _____ owner _____ other: _____

Type of organization *(check only one)*

for-profit

____ private proprietary or partnership
____ corporation or chain (e.g. Kindercare, Children's World, LaPetit)
____ corporate-sponsored (e.g. Bright Horizons, CorporateFamily Solutions)

nonprofit

____ independent or affiliated with a social service agency/community center
____ Head Start
____ publicly funded federal, state, or local government (e.g. park district)
____ church or temple sponsored program
____ public school affiliated
____ employer sponsored (e.g. hospital)
____ military
____ university or college affiliated

I reached my current position because . . . *(check the **ONE** that best describes you)*

____ I always knew I wanted to become a director of a center
____ Others saw my leadership ability and encouraged me to pursue the position
____ I needed more challenge in a job, and becoming a director provided that challenge
____ I was a good teacher and was asked to take the position
____ I knew that to advance professionally in the field I would need to become a director
____ In order to make the salary I needed, I had to become a director.

Please complete the following sentences:

My greatest satisfaction as a director is _____

My greatest frustration as a director is _____

Indicate with a ✓ your level of commitment to your current job using a scale of 1 *(not committed at all)* to 10 *(very committed)*:

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*
current job										

Think about your current position and check (✓) one statement from each pair of statements that best represents your current perceptions of your job.

- ☐ I am often unsure of what is expected of me
- ☐ I know exactly what is expected of me

- ☐ I am expected to do things I don't believe in
- ☐ I am seldom expected to do things I don't believe in

- ☐ I am uncertain about how much authority I have
- ☐ I feel certain about how much authority I have

- ☐ I don't have enough resources to do my job well
- ☐ I have sufficient resources to do my job well

- ☐ I spend time on unnecessary, irrelevant tasks
- ☐ I spend time doing only important essential tasks

- ☐ I don't get the support I need to do my job well
- ☐ I get the support I need to do my job well

When you think about your current job, what is your greatest concern? _____

_____

Now think in terms of a metaphor to describe the director's role, your current job, and your center/ organization. A metaphor links an idea or concept to a visual representation of that idea or concept. For example, *Life is a highway...because we cruise along and sometimes we have to make a detour to get where we want to go.* You can also use a simile inserting the word *like* (*Life is like a highway...)*

A director is a _____

because _____

My job is a _____

because _____

My center/organization is a _____

because _____

Think back now to when you first became the director of an early childhood program. Check (✓) one statement from each set of statements that best represents your perceptions of your job at that time.

- ☐ I hoped no one would find out how scared I really was
- ☐ I felt confident and self assured

- ☐ My expectations for myself were unrealistic
- ☐ My expectations for myself were realistic

- ☐ I was not prepared for the kinds of issues I encountered
- ☐ I felt well trained for my administrative position

- ☐ I worried the teachers/ parents wouldn't like me
- ☐ I was confident everyone would like me

What was your one area of greatest concern when you first became a director? _____

_____

Circle the ***ONE*** word/phrase that best describes your role as a director:

planner	nurturer	role model	mentor	decision-maker
supervisor	motivator	counselor	fundraiser	crisis manager
advocate	evaluator	leader	manager	problem-solver

Select the ***ONE*** word/phrase that best describes your current job:

challenging	creative	stimulating	demanding	predictable
boring	difficult	frustrating	satisfying	never ending
enjoyable	routine	stressful	enriching	emotionally draining
exciting	rewarding	independent	powerful	unpredictable

Please indicate ***ALL*** paid positions you held prior to your current administrative position and how long you worked in each position.

_____ classroom teacher
- infant-toddler _____ years
- preschool _____ years
- kindergarten _____ years
- 1st/2nd/3rd grade _____ years

_____ assistant director _____ years
_____ education coordinator _____ years
_____ other position in the field of education: _____ _____ years
_____ other position outside the field of education: _____ _____ years

Check the ***ONE*** phrase that best describes your knowledge and skill as a director.

I am a . . . _____ beginning director _____ competent director _____ master director

In what area of your administrative role do you feel you have made the most growth and change since your first day on the job?_____

_____

Do you intend to work as a director for at least three more years? _____ yes _____ no

If you answered no, why? _____

Knowing what you know now about the satisfactions and frustrations of the job, if you could rewrite your career script, would you make the decision to become a director again? _____ yes _____ no

If you answered no, why?_____

Put a check ✓ next to the ***ONE*** stage that best describes you at this point in time in your career.

____ ***Survival (S)***
I just try to get through the day without a major problem occurring. I am striving for acceptance and attempting to achieve a comfort and security level in dealing with everyday management issues and problems.

____ ***Competence Building (CB)***
I am slowly improving my administrative skills and abilities. I seek out new materials, methods, and strategies. I attend conferences, workshops, and classes on my own initiative.

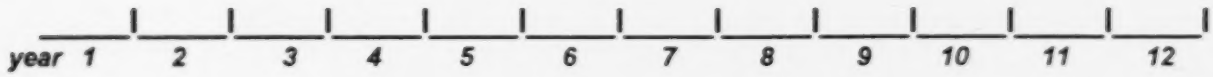
____ ***Enthusiastic and Growing (EG)***
I feel competent and confident in my role as director, but continue to grow as a professional. I am constantly seeking new ways to enrich my abilities.

____ ***Career Frustration (CF)***
I am frustrated and disillusioned with early childhood administration. My job satisfaction is waning and I have begun to question why I am doing this work.

____ ***Reflective and Inspiring (RI)***
I have achieved a high level of competence and am perceived by my colleagues as a leader in the area of program administration. I am a mentor to other directors.

____ ***Career Wind-Down (CW)***
I am preparing to leave my administrative role. I am looking forward to a career change or retirement.

Using the six stages above as a guide, think back over the time you have served in an administrative capacity as an assistant director or director. Using the abbreviations (S, CB, EG, CF, RI, CW), plot along the timeline below any stages you have experienced. (You may have experienced a stage more than once or you may not have experienced a stage at all.) Note any major events that may have impacted these stages (e.g., promotion, job change, maternity leave). If you have been a director for more than 12 years, continue the timeline adding additional years as needed.



Think of a metaphor that captures your career path:_____

_____

Thank you. *When you have completed all sections, return this questionnaire to Dr. Paula Jorde Bloom, National-Louis University, 1000 Capitol Drive, Wheeling, IL 60090.*